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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0107
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 15013

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: AGGRESSIVE POLICE ACTION AGAINST ANTI-PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MEETING

1. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL EYE-WITNESSES INCLUDING EMBASSY OFFICERS, A NUMBER OF OPPOSITION FIGURES ATTEMPTED TO HOLD A

MEETING AT THE LOWER HOUSE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AT 0900 SEPTEMBER 18 TO PROTEST THE ONE-MAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. SOME PARTICIPANTS HAD AN EFFIGY OF PRESIDENT THIEU AND BANNERS PROTESTING THE ELECTION. THE ENTRANCE TO THE LOWER HOUSE WAS CLOSED, AND AS SOON AS A FEW DOZEN PERSONS HAD GATHERED OUTSIDE POLICE LOBBED TEAR GAS GRENADES INTO THE GROUP AND DISPERSED IT. POLICE THEN BEGAN THROWING TEAR GAS CANISTERS INTO GROUPS OF FOREIGN NEWSMEN GATHERED NEARBY, AND SOME WERE BEATEN BY PLAINCLOTHESMEN ARMED WITH STAVES. DISTURBANCES CONTINUED FOR ALMOST TWO HOURS, WITH POLICE USING TEAR GAS HEAVILY

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AND ALMOST AT RANDOM TO BREAK UP ANY SMALL GROUP WHICH FORMED IN THE AREA.

2. OPPOSITION FIGURES NOTED AT THE SCENE INCLUDED DEPUTIES PHAN THIEP, NGO CONG DUC, DUONG VAN BA, LY QUY CHUNG, NGUYEN HUU CHUNG, HOUVHUU TUONG, AND TRAN NGOC NHUAN. SENATOR TON AI LIENG OF THE OPPOSITION BUDDHIST SLATE WAS THERE, AS WERE OTHER WELL-KNOWN LEFTISTS AND OPPOSITIONISTS SUCH AS MRS. NGO BA THANH (WHO WAS ARRESTED), EX-SENATOR (MRS.) NGUYEN PHUOC DAI, LAWYER TRAN NGOC LIENG, MISS TRAN THI LANPUC (ARRESTED), PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL NGUYEN TRAN, AND PROFESSOR NGUYEN THANH VINH OF THE NEW PEOPLES MOVEMENT.

3. FOREIGN NEWSMEN ARE INCENSED AT THE HEAVY-HANDED POLICE ATTACKS AGAINST THEM. (FOR EXAMPLE, GLORIA EMERSON OF THE NY TIMES WAS HIT ON THE HEAD WITH A TEAR GAS CANISTER THROWN FROM A DISTANCE OF A FEW FEET AND NANCY PETERSON OF THE SAME ORGANIZATION WAS KNOCKED DOWN AND HAD HER CAMERA BROKEN.) SO FAR AS WE KNOW, POLICE HAVE NOT BEEN INSTRUCTED TO TAKE MORE SEVERE MEASURES WITH DEMONSTRATORS. THE INCIDENT AT THE LOWER HOUSE THEREFORE APPEARS TO BE A CASE OF AGGRESSIVE OVER-REACTION BY THE LOCAL POLICE FORCES.

4. A SHARP CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RIOTING STUDENTS AND POLICE AT THE BUDDHIST VAN HANH UNIVERSITY INVOLVING FIREBOMBS, ROCK-THROWING AND TEARGAS ALSO TOOK PLACE THIS MORNING. FURTHER DETAILS OF BOTH INCIDENTS ARE BEING REPORTED IN OTHER CHANNELS. BUNKER